

## Diversité urbaine



# Aboriginal Languages in Quebec: Fighting Linguicide with Bilingual Education

Donald M. Taylor, Julie Caouette, Esther Usborne et Stephen C. Wright

Numéro hors-série, automne 2008

Plurilinguisme et identités au Canada

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/019562ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/019562ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Groupe de recherche diversité urbaine  
CEETUM

### ISSN

1913-0694 (imprimé)

1913-0708 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Taylor, D. M., Caouette, J., Usborne, E. & Wright, S. C. (2008). Aboriginal Languages in Quebec: Fighting Linguicide with Bilingual Education. *Diversité urbaine*, 69–89. <https://doi.org/10.7202/019562ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Les peuples autochtones du Québec luttent afin de préserver la survie de leur langue et de leur culture. Un élément essentiel de la décolonisation et de l'autonomisation autochtone est la protection et l'enrichissement de la langue ancestrale autochtone. Dans cet article, nous effectuons une analyse de vingt années de recherche dans le Nord du Québec (Nunavik) impliquant des élèves inuits scolarisés en français et en anglais. Nos recherches ont révélé que ces enfants non seulement apprennent mieux dans leur propre langue ancestrale plutôt que dans une des langues dominantes de la société, mais aussi qu'ils développent une image d'eux-mêmes plus positive, et une représentation plus saine des Inuits en tant que groupe. Il est démontré que l'enseignement bilingue est d'une importance cruciale, contribuant à la vitalité de la langue et de la culture inuites.

# ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN QUEBEC: FIGHTING LINGUICIDE WITH BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Donald M. Taylor  
Julie Caouette  
Esther Usborne  
Stephen C. Wright

## Abstract/Résumé

Aboriginal peoples in Quebec are fighting for the survival of their language and culture. An essential component of Aboriginal decolonization and empowerment is the protection and enhancement of the Aboriginal heritage language. In this article, we review twenty years of research in Arctic Quebec (Nunavik) involving Inuit students educated in Inuktitut as well as in French and English. Our research reveals that children not only learn better in their own heritage language as opposed to one of the societally dominant languages, but also develop a more positive view of themselves, and a healthier view of Inuit as a group. Bilingual Education is shown to be of crucial importance for the vitality of Inuit language and culture.

Les peuples autochtones du Québec luttent afin de préserver la survie de leur langue et de leur culture. Un élément essentiel de la décolonisation et de l'autonomisation autochtone est la protection et l'enrichissement de la langue ancestrale autochtone. Dans cet article, nous effectuons une analyse de vingt années de recherche dans le Nord du Québec (Nunavik) impliquant des élèves inuits scolarisés en français et en anglais. Nos recherches ont révélé que ces enfants non seulement apprennent mieux dans leur propre langue ancestrale plutôt que dans une des langues dominantes de la société, mais aussi qu'ils développent une image d'eux-mêmes plus positive, et une représentation plus saine des Inuits en tant que groupe. Il est démontré que l'enseignement bilingue est d'une importance cruciale, contribuant à la vitalité de la langue et de la culture inuites.

**Keywords:** Aboriginals, Bilingual Education, Inuit, Inuktitut, linguicide, Nunavik.

**Mots clés :** Autochtones, éducation bilingue, Inuit, Inuktitut, Linguicide, Nunavik.

WHEN AN ITALIAN, GREEK, OR PORTUGUESE FAMILY COMES TO QUEBEC, and their children lose the heritage language, it is a loss for the child and the family. When an Aboriginal child in Quebec loses her or his heritage language, it is not only a loss for the child and the family, but a cultural tragedy that threatens the very existence of the group. Most cultural groups in Quebec can withstand a degree of language loss because they belong to large culturally vibrant groups that are not worried about the very survival of their language and culture. Italy, Greece, and Portugal are nation-states that ensure the vitality of their languages and cultures.

The same is not true for Aboriginal peoples. They are fighting for their cultural lives, and language is at the heart of that identity. Canada boasts some 53 Aboriginal groups, but the sad reality is that only three languages are judged to be relatively healthy: Cree, Ojibwa and Inuktitut (Norris, 2007). Language loss among Aboriginal peoples is symbolic of a destructive colonization process that has threatened Aboriginal communities to their very core (Taylor, 2002). The litany of social problems including poverty, malnutrition, chronic disease, alcohol and substance misuse, domestic violence, and widespread academic underachievement are the present-day manifestations of that process (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001). The focus of empowerment efforts by Aboriginal communities is to decolonize their legacy and carve a future built on hope and a sense of agency. Protecting and enhancing, or in most cases reclaiming, their heritage language is central to the process of decolonization (Fishman, 1991, 2001).

Using the heritage language in the formal school environment is essential to the success of this decolonization process (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Even in those isolated cases where the Aboriginal language is strong, the home environment will not be a sufficient vehicle for promoting the heritage language (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Given that Aboriginal languages did not evolve in the modern context, even the strongest Aboriginal languages lack the vocabulary and references to permit fluency about the range of issues that modern formal education and the global economy demand, nor indeed the idioms that young people need to converse about their technology-driven reality. The only solution is for formal education to partner with the home in promoting Aboriginal languages. Indeed, Fishman (1991, 2001) in his classic *Reversing Language Shift* model documents the importance of institutional support for threatened languages including the need for the use of the heritage language in the home as well as at school. Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argues that schools are an important agent of change when attempting to save a threatened language and by extension a threatened culture.

---

A number of challenging questions arise when a decision is made to include an Aboriginal language as a meaningful component in the school curriculum. Virtually every Aboriginal family is firmly committed to supporting attempts to have their children internalize a strong and proud Aboriginal identity. Families are equally committed, however, to having their children master the dominant language that will allow them to participate fully in mainstream society. Thus for many parents, the use of Aboriginal language as a language of instruction in school raises the following questions: a) can it improve students' ability in their Aboriginal language?; b) can it increase self-esteem and positive attitudes toward school?; c) can it have the adverse effect of retarding their development in the mainstream language? These are issues we address by reviewing more than twenty years of our research, both experimental and correlational, in Arctic Quebec (Nunavik), involving Inuit students.

We begin our exploration of the impact of Bilingual Education in Nunavik by describing the state of Aboriginal languages in Quebec generally, and in Nunavik more specifically. This is followed by a systematic analysis of research on the impact of Bilingual Education on proficiency in Inuktitut, proficiency in French and English, and on personal and collective self-esteem.

### **Aboriginal Languages: The Distressing Reality**

Many Aboriginal groups in Canada and across North America have had their language completely replaced by the societally dominant languages, French and English. Although Quebec has a more positive profile than other provinces in Canada in terms of the maintenance and teaching of Aboriginal languages, the state of Aboriginal languages in Quebec is nonetheless in decline (Maurais, 1996).

Establishing precise and reliable figures regarding the Aboriginal language reality in Quebec is problematic. The most complete source of such information is the Canadian census conducted by Statistics Canada every five years (Dorais, 1996). We are reduced to providing a very tentative portrait of the Aboriginal language reality in Quebec using information from the 2001 Canadian census, as well as information compiled by other experts on Aboriginal languages.

There are nine Aboriginal languages still used in Quebec: Montagnais, Naskapi, Inuktitut, Cree, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Mohawk, Abenaki, and Micmac (Dorais, 1996). The extent to which these languages are actually

---

spoken and used as the main means of communication varies greatly. According to the 2001 Canadian census, the languages most often reported in Quebec as Aboriginal mother tongues are Cree (11,810 people), Inuktitut (8,620 people) and Montagnais-Naskapi (8,180 people). Overall, results from the 2001 census showed there were a total of 79,400 people who reported an Aboriginal ethnic origin in Quebec, with 38,530 reporting some knowledge of an Aboriginal language.

These statistics are somewhat misleading however, as having an Aboriginal mother tongue, or having some knowledge of an Aboriginal language, does not necessarily mean that this language is a primary means of communication. Only 45.3% of people declaring an Aboriginal origin report speaking the Aboriginal language at home (Statistics Canada, 2001). Often, the learning of official languages comes at the expense of the Aboriginal languages, which are overwhelmed by the languages of those who hold power (Dorais, 1996). The official languages, French and English, are very widely used at home and in public situations amongst Quebec Aboriginals (see Table 1). The overall portrait, then, is more distressing than the numbers suggest. Less than half of Quebec's Aboriginal population reports even some knowledge of their heritage language. Furthermore, the heritage language appears to have been sacrificed in favour of the societally dominant languages in approximately fifty percent of the Aboriginal population (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Languages known and used by Quebec Aboriginals:  
2001 Canadian census**

Aboriginal people in Quebec = 79 400	Number	Percent
Knowledge of French Only	19 150	24.1
Knowledge of English Only	3 920	4.9
Knowledge of both English and French Only	16 485	20.8
Some Knowledge of Aboriginal Language	38 530	48.5
Aboriginal Language Spoken at Home	35 968	45.3

The rate of Aboriginal language maintenance appears to be directly proportional to the geographic isolation of the community where the language is spoken. In Nunavik, the most northerly and most isolated region of Quebec, 97.9% of the 8,760 people reporting an Aboriginal origin use their Aboriginal language in the home setting. However, further south, the reality for Aboriginal language use looks increasingly bleak. In the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region there are 5,050 people reporting an Aboriginal origin with only 28.3% reporting speaking the Aboriginal language at home. In

the Outaouais region of southwestern Quebec, there are 8,120 Aboriginal people, but only 3.1% of Aboriginal people speak the ancestral language at home. Finally, in the Laurentides regions, just north of Montreal, there are 2,610 Aboriginal people, none of whom report speaking the Aboriginal language at home.

In his concluding chapter on Aboriginal languages in Quebec, Louis-Jacques Dorais (1996) opines that Aboriginal languages in the province have become minority languages under pressure from all sides due to the economic, social, and cultural omnipotence of the French and English dominant languages. Languages, once strong, such as Wendat (Huron) and Eastern Abenaki, have completely disappeared and will most likely never be heard again. He predicts that Mohawk will likely disappear in one or two generations, followed closely by Micmac. Dorais cautions that although in the more isolated areas of the province the Aboriginal languages remain the principle vehicles of communication, there is increasing threat. With the spread of modern communication technologies and the accelerated economic development of peripheral regions, pressure on the vitality of Aboriginal languages will continue to increase.

### **Inuktitut in Nunavik**

Compared to other Aboriginal communities in Quebec, the spread of mainstream society was very late in coming to Nunavik. The Inuit, a traditionally nomadic people remained isolated from mainstream Canadian society until as late as the mid-1950s. At this time, Inuit were forced to settle into small communities that remain relatively isolated even today. These communities are accessible only by air, and many Inuit residents have never visited an urban centre. The delay of mainstream influence, along with Nunavik's geographic isolation, may account for the relatively strong vitality of the language, Inuktitut. Written Inuktitut uses a syllabic system. The Inuit syllabics evolved towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the syllabic system initially designed for the Cree. The writing system in both the Roman alphabet and syllabics was standardized in 1976 with minor adjustments made by the Kativik School Board that were specific to the Nunavik context (Drapeau, 1996).

Despite the vitality of the Inuit language compared to other Aboriginal languages, there is evidence for the growing intrusion of the societally dominant languages, French and English, into these Inuit communities. In a comprehensive survey of five Inuit communities in Nunavik documenting

---

language fluency and use in these communities, results showed that Inuktitut was used more often than French and English, though several trends suggested the erosion of Inuktitut (Taylor & Wright, 2002). Inuit were found to be much more fluent in spoken than in written Inuktitut. The difference between these skills was large, indicating the need for improved literacy skills in Inuktitut if it is to compete with French and English. Almost everyone in the communities also had some ability in English, while English and French Canadians living in these communities rarely had any knowledge of Inuktitut. The diglossic reality then, is that English is the prestige lingua franca in these communities: the one language that links Inuit across northern Canada and that everyone can use to communicate. This gives English a very powerful status, and French is not far behind, while Inuktitut is confined to more private, informal, lower status functions.

When examining language skills across age range, there was further indication that Inuktitut is in decline (Taylor & Wright, 2002). Community residents who were over the age of 45 were extremely fluent in Inuktitut and had only limited knowledge of French or English. However, those between 25 and 44 years of age were less fluent in Inuktitut and had greater competence in English or in some cases French. Finally, those who were younger than 25 years of age showed the most evidence of subtractive bilingualism: the learning of the dominant language at the expense of the Aboriginal language. These younger Inuit were again less fluent in Inuktitut and had the greatest ability in English or French.

Findings from the survey point to other factors leading to a weakened Inuktitut in these northern communities, attesting to the reality of a diglossic situation (Taylor & Wright, 2002). Inuktitut was found to be the dominant language at home, and was used during traditional Inuit activities such as hunting and fishing. However, the dominant language in the workplace was most often French and/or English at the expense of Inuktitut. As the importance of the workplace increases in the lives of young Inuit, it is likely that French and English will replace Inuktitut. Finally, results showed that although radio in the communities was for the most part listened to in Inuktitut, television was very widely watched, and mostly tuned to English channels. For example, community members under the age of 25 reported spending 7-8 hours a day watching television with at least five and a half of those hours being in English.

Young people within Inuit communities are the ones who are most affected by the advent of new communication technology and the power of the

---

societally dominant languages, but they are also the ones responsible for maintaining and advancing the Aboriginal language. When asked about the role of the school in language learning, most community members indicated that the school must play a role in the advancement of Inuktitut, but that it must simultaneously provide instruction in French and English so as to prepare young people for participation in mainstream society (Taylor & Wright, 2002). In order to attenuate the threat posed by English and French in these northern communities while at the same time preparing young people for the future, bilingual education plays a key role.

### **The Importance of Bilingual Education: The Case of Nunavik**

Our research in Nunavik explores the Bilingual Education program involving the use of Inuktitut, French, and English as languages of instruction in the early grades and points to the pivotal importance of Bilingual Education for Aboriginal language maintenance as well as for the well-being of Aboriginal individuals and their communities (Taylor & Wright, 2002).

Before outlining the results from our program of research, it is useful to briefly describe the educational context in Nunavik, the main setting of our studies. Virtually all Aboriginal schools in North America are based on a “mainstream” model. The schools in Nunavik are no exception. There is no Inuit model for formal institutionalized education. The introduction of formal education itself represents an intrusion into the indigenous culture. Thus, even a truly “Inuit school” would have to borrow much from the mainstream Canadian model. Yet, a landmark agreement with the Quebec government in 1975 (The James Bay Agreement) gave the Inuit considerable economic, cultural, and educational autonomy. Since then, there has been a real effort to reflect Inuit culture in the educational process and a relatively strong Inuit presence in the institution responsible for the education of all children in the 14 communities in Nunavik: the Kativik School Board. The Board implemented a form of Bilingual Education that was designed to foster expertise in Inuktitut and prepare students to participate in higher education in either French or English. The result was a program whereby students in Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 received instruction exclusively in Inuktitut. From Grade 3 through to the end of secondary school, students choose either a French or English stream of education. The program has been so successful that instruction in Inuktitut has been extended to Grade 3 in all communities of the Kativik School Board.

This Bilingual Education program represented a compromise between international research in the field of Bilingual Education and the practical

---



challenges of human resources and materials. Although an ideal program would extend “heritage language” instruction well beyond the Grade 3 level, the Kativik program is limited due to difficulties in recruiting and fully training Inuit teachers and in developing pedagogical material in Inuktitut.

There are a number of advantages in conducting research in the Nunavik sociolinguistic setting. First, among the fourteen isolated communities of Nunavik, Inuktitut is spoken by virtually all Inuit in the communities, a rarity among Aboriginal minorities in North America. Second, the isolation and homogeneity of the communities minimizes the impact of dominant group pressures on Inuit culture. Thus, in each Inuit community there is only one school, while family composition is culturally homogeneous and social class differences are minimal.

Up until the late 1980s, there was no Inuktitut schooling within the Kuujuaq community. However, in 1988 the school principal decided that parents should have the option to have their children schooled either in Inuktitut, in French, or in English and this for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. This allowed for a systematic evaluation of the consequences of children being schooled in Inuktitut versus only in French or only in English. By comparing children in the Inuktitut program with children enrolled in the French or English programs, a direct evaluation of these programs could be conducted. The research design called for testing all children in the Inuktitut, French, and English programs, with every child being tested in all three languages. We also tested their level of analytic intelligence and their sense of self-esteem.

### **The Intellectual Potential of Aboriginal Students**

A first step in the program of research was to test the usual stereotypes about the intellectual potential of Inuit children (Wright, Taylor, & Ruggiero, 1996). This is analogous to the first step in Fishman’s (1991, 2001) Reversing Language Shift (RLS) model called “Ideological Clarification”. Aboriginal students in general, and Inuit students in particular, do not perform well at school (Duffy, 1988; Rampaul, Singh, & Didyk, 1984; Robitaille & Choinière, 1985). For example, in the community that serves as the setting for the present research, the graduation rates in the five years prior to our study were less than 50% for Grade 9 and less than 15% for high school (Kativik School Board, 1990). This reality led some parents and educators to question the intellectual capacity of Inuit children. Consequently, this study sought to determine if Inuit children enter school with reduced intellectual skills. The

---

study also investigated the possibility that key factors in the educational environment disrupt or slow Inuit children's cognitive development. Specifically, could instruction in a second language, by a teacher of a different cultural background, retard the child's academic achievement by disrupting the development of the child's analytic intelligence? This is a popular explanation for minority student underachievement, which emphasizes the discontinuity between the child's home culture and that of the White-dominated educational setting.

The measure used to test analytic intelligence was the Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices. This is a standardized test of analytic intelligence (Carpenter, Just, & Snell, 1990; Raven, Raven, & Court, 1993). It was chosen because it is arguably the most culturally unbiased test of all the available standard intelligence tests. Over several years, approximately 100 Inuit students were administered the test to investigate Inuit children's analytic intelligence at the time they entered Kindergarten and to follow the development of this capacity during their first two years of formal education. The performances of the children from Nunavik were compared to children in the United States (Raven, 1990), children from across Canada, and children from southern regions of Quebec (Ionescu, Jourdan-Ionescu, Alain, Rousseau, & Inostroza, 1992).

Despite their lack of experience with formal test-taking, the children from Nunavik scored equal to, and in some cases, better than, children of the same age from across North America. Clearly, Inuit students have the underlying analytic intelligence necessary to successfully master school material. Furthermore, results show a steady increase in their scores through each grade, indicating a strong intellectual development through their first school years. This supports the position that interaction with a mainstream-type school system does not retard Inuit children's intellectual development. This conclusion was further supported by a lack of difference in the scores of Inuit children in the Inuktitut program, and Inuit children in the French/English programs.

## **Using the Heritage Language in School**

We then investigated whether heritage language education can provide the academic foundation that enables children to gain the proper academic skills and knowledge to succeed in the school curriculum (Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000; Louis & Taylor, 2001). Three arguments underlie the rationale for a bilingual program whereby the heritage language, Inuktitut,

---

is the language of instruction in the early school years. First, it is argued that students will benefit academically and psychologically from learning in the language and in the cultural context with which they identify and feel most at ease (Cummins, 1989). Second, their Inuktitut language skills should be enhanced cognitively by school instruction in Inuktitut (Crawford, 1989). Third, the assumption is that any cognitive gains students make in Inuktitut will be transferred quickly to other languages such as French and English (Lambert, 1983; Willig, 1985).

We investigated the language development of Inuit children receiving instruction in Inuktitut compared to Inuit children from the same community receiving instruction in only one of the two societally dominant second languages of the province, namely French and English. In addition, Inuit children's language abilities were compared with a sample of mainstream White Francophones in a French language of instruction program in the same community (Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000).

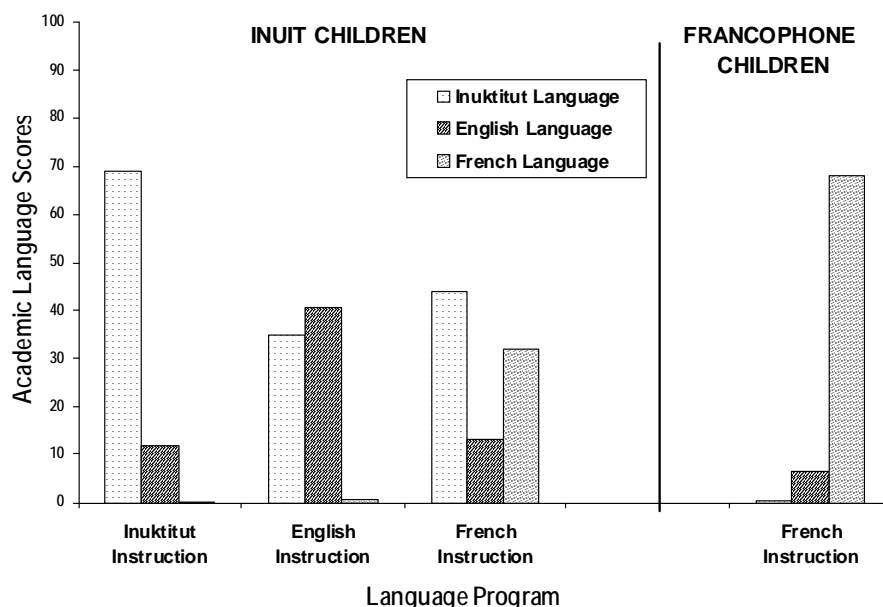
Each child was tested in all three languages at the beginning and at the end of the school year for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. Each battery of tests was comprised of some 16 tests designed to assess general language competencies and specific language skills. The tests covered a range of skills and difficulty levels. The tests were designed by a committee comprised of researchers, teachers, and education specialists, and were designed to be a fair test for children who are following the Kativik School Board curriculum. This curriculum, while designed for Inuit students, does parallel the broader Quebec curriculum and is equally demanding.

The results of several years of testing, involving approximately 150 students, point to significant academic and linguistic advantages for students receiving heritage language instruction in Inuktitut. Inuit students in the Inuktitut program show the expected achievement in their scores in Inuktitut from Kindergarten through to Grade 2. As seen in Figure 1, this profile for Inuit students in the Inuktitut program is precisely the same pattern and level of achievement shown by mainstream Francophone students in the French language program. The Inuit students in the Inuktitut program also show some achievement in English, although not achieving the same levels as those in Inuktitut. Finally, their development in French is minimal. This is not surprising, given that French is not widely used in the community, in contrast with the pervasive use of English.

As seen in Figure 1, Inuit students in the English program show strong achievement in English by the time they reach Grade 2. Because English is

---

Figure 1. Inuit children in each language program and White children in French program: Comparison of language proficiency at the end of Grade 2.



not their home language, by the end of Grade 2 these students have not achieved the same level in English as the students in the Inuktitut program have achieved in Inuktitut. While students in the English program do develop their Inuktitut skills, they do not reach the high level shown by those in the Inuktitut program.

Finally, Inuit children in the French program make good progress in French, although they do not receive the benefits of community support for the French language as those in the Inuktitut and English programs do (Figure 1). Like children in the English program, the Inuktitut skills of children in the French program develop somewhat over the years, but they fall well short of the children who are in the Inuktitut program.

Some caution is needed in the interpretation of these results. Children were enrolled in a particular language program as a result of parental preferences. Thus parents who chose to enrol their child in the Inuktitut program may be those more likely to use Inuktitut as their home language relative to those who chose the English or French language program. This limits our ability to make causal statements about the effect of the school program on language proficiency. However, the size, isolation, and relative homogeneity of out-of-school influences within the Inuit population reduces

many of the other confounds common to research designed to evaluate pedagogical programs. Furthermore, baseline data was collected at the beginning of the Kindergarten year and showed that in the case of heritage language skills, Inuit children in all three language programs enter the programs with the same language proficiency (Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000). Overall, our findings support claims that early instruction exclusively in a societally dominant language, French or English, may result in subtractive bilingualism among Inuit, and that heritage language education may limit this subtractive bilingualism process.

Beyond the negative impact of dominant language instruction on children's Inuktitut language skills, another facet of these results was that children taught in their early years in French or English seem to have failed to develop higher language skills in either their heritage or second language. This failure to develop complex language proficiency was explored by dividing children's overall score into two components. First, a subset of the tests were combined to form a measure of simple "conversational" language proficiency. The more demanding tests were combined to form a measure of "academic" language proficiency.

The results for the conversational language proficiency and academic language proficiency are particularly revealing. At the end of Grade 2, the total scores on the easier tests that measure conversational proficiency are relatively high for children in all three language programs. However, for the more difficult academic proficiency tests, the students in the Inuktitut program score much higher than those in the French or English programs. This suggests that Inuit children in the Inuktitut program are developing a level of language skill that will allow them to use the Inuktitut language to solve complex, intellectually challenging problems. However, Inuit children in the French and English programs, while retaining their ability to carry on simple conversations, are falling behind in their ability to function at the highest level in Inuktitut. Moreover, they had difficulties acquiring academic proficiency in the dominant language. This is consistent with Cummins' (2005) assertion that without heritage language instruction, massive erosion of students' heritage language competence occurs over the course of their schooling.

## **Language Transfer**

The hypothesis that language skills from early years of instruction in the heritage language can actually transfer to a dominant language education

---

context was also tested (Louis & Taylor, 2001). This study was conducted in a community in Nunavik where children are all instructed in Inuktitut until the end of Grade 3 and then switch to either English or French instruction. Children were followed from Grade 3 (the last year of Inuktitut language instruction) into Grades 4 and 5 (the first two years of second language instruction). The analyses addressed three important questions: 1) to what extent do children progress in their language of instruction?; 2) to what extent do children continue to progress in Inuktitut after switching to French or English language education?; 3) is second language learning associated with a subtractive or additive relationship with Inuktitut language proficiency? Specifically, can the foundational language skills acquired in early heritage language instruction be transferred and facilitate progress in French and English?

In general, children made steady progress in their language of instruction (French or English) and also maintained a consistently high level of Inuktitut. Importantly, in terms of transfer of language skills, we explored whether progress in second language acquisition was related to a strong foundation in Inuktitut language proficiency. Based on regression analyses, an additive relationship between Inuktitut and English or French was revealed. That is, a strong foundation in Inuktitut in Grade 3 was the best predictor of second language success in French or English in Grades 4, and the effects of Inuktitut proficiency on second language acquisition in Grade 5 were mediated through the foundational year in Grade 4. Furthermore, we found that ongoing progress in Inuktitut was also associated with stronger second language proficiency. In sum, these findings point to the importance of baseline Inuktitut proficiency acquired through early heritage language education as a foundation for the critical transition to second language education in the dominant language (Cummins, 2005).

## **Bilingual Education and Personal Collective Self-Esteem**

Thus far, the present results provide evidence that minority language speakers benefit from early instruction in their heritage language, a pattern also obtained in other studies (Crawford, 1989; Cummins, 1989; Willig, 1985). As the support for heritage language education grows, some authors claim that greater use of heritage languages in school is a necessary remedy for present patterns of school failure among minority students (Cummins, 1989, 1990; McLaughlin, 1989). These authors have looked beyond the linguistic advantages of heritage language education and are pointing to potential social benefits. One of the mechanisms by which heritage language

---

education may improve academic success is hypothesized to be through enhancement of the child's self-esteem (Appel, 1988; Cummins, 1989, 1990; Hernández-Chavez, 1984).

Entering school for the first time can be traumatic for the child and difficulties in coping may be heightened when pupils not only need to adjust to a new environment, but must also learn a new language from a teacher from a different culture (Cummins, 1989). What minority students may learn from such cultural discontinuity between the home and the school environment is that their heritage language is not valued, and, by extension, that neither they, nor their parents nor their cultural group are valued. Before long, the child may develop a lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, alienation, or disaffection from school - a state of anomie that is not conducive to effective learning (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Covington, 1989; Cummins, 1986).

The Bilingual Education program established in the early years in Kuujjuaq allowed for a controlled test of the effects of language of instruction on both personal and collective self-esteem (Wright & Taylor, 1995). Self-esteem can be difficult to measure, and researchers cannot simply ask young children about their self-esteem. Instead, more indirect methodologies must be developed. The procedures we developed arise out of self-esteem research dating back to the classic Black/White doll studies showing that African American pupils preferred to play with White dolls over Black ones (Clark & Clark, 1939; for reviews see Aboud, 1988; Brand, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974; Williams & Morland, 1976). The test we developed involved the use of Polaroid photographs. At the beginning of the language tests, the confederate took two photographs of the child. The child was given one photograph as a gift to take home. The second photograph was added to a set of eight photographs of other children who were the same age as the pupil being tested. Each set of photographs comprised four Inuit children (two boys and two girls) and four White children (two boys and two girls). None of the children in the photographs were known to the child being tested.

The child was presented with the nine photographs and asked to sort them on a variety of dimensions. For example, the child was asked to pick all the "girls", or pick all the "Inuit". This first step was to ensure that the child understood the nature of the task and was able to perform simple social categorizations. In order to assess level of self-esteem, the child was asked to pick all the children who are "smart", who are "nice", who are "happy", who have "lots of friends", who "like to go to school", who are

---

“good at lots of things”, and who “the other children don’t like”. A score of 1 was given each time the child included his or her photo in response to a positive attribute and a score of -1 was given each time the child included his or her own photo in response to a negative attribute. The frequency with which the child selected him or herself provided a measure of personal self-esteem. Total scores could range from -1 to 6.

Group-level effects can also be tested, by considering the number of photographs of other Inuit children and White children the child picks in response to these questions. If the child consistently sees the White children as more positive than the Inuit children, this would indicate a low level of esteem for his or her own group - lower collective self-esteem (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Cross, 1987). The frequency with which the child selected the four Inuit targets in response to the positive attributes and ignored them in response to the negative attributes represented the measure of collective self-esteem. Total scores ranged from -4 to 24.

Results show that self-esteem is positively affected by having children schooled in their heritage language. Generally, Inuit children in all three language programs (Inuktitut, French, and English) began Kindergarten with relatively positive self-esteem. Furthermore, Inuit children in the second language programs maintained this positive view of themselves throughout the school year. However, as seen in Figure 2, the self-esteem of students in the Inuktitut program became even more positive over the school year. Thus, students in the Inuktitut program actually showed an increase in self-esteem, whereas students in the second language programs in French or English only maintained their self-esteem (see Figure 2).

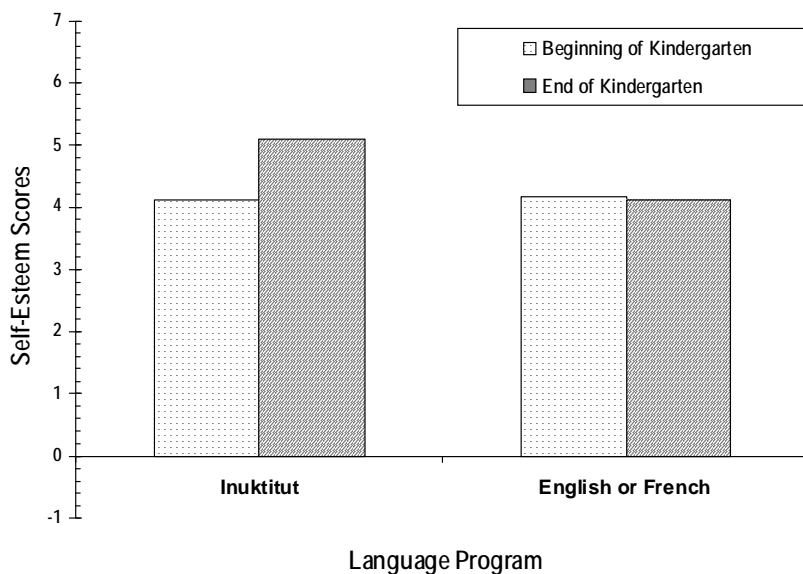
Not only was the children’s personal self-esteem affected positively by Inuit teachers providing schooling in Inuktitut, but there were positive group-based effects as well. As seen in Figure 3, Inuit children in the Inuktitut program tended to have a slight preference for other Inuit children relative to White children. This is a normal and healthy form of mild in-group favouritism (Aboud, 2005). However, Inuit students enrolled in the French or English second language programs showed the reverse pattern; they actually preferred to be with White children over Inuit children (See Figure 3).

Thus, the findings support the hypothesis that early heritage language education can have a positive effect on the personal and collective self-esteem of minority language students, a benefit not provided by second language instruction.

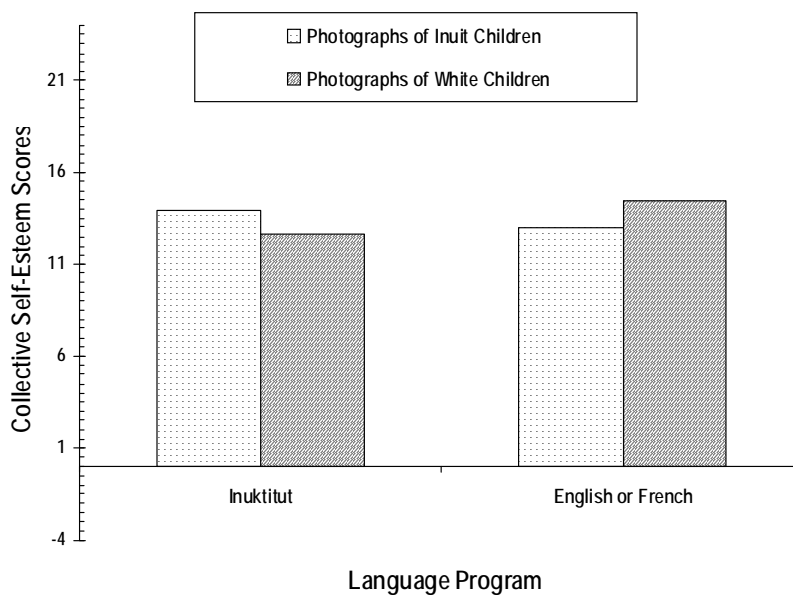
---



**Figure 2. Inuit children's personal self-esteem scores: Comparison of Inuit children in Inuktitut and in French/English Kindergartens.**



**Figure 3. Inuit children's collective self-esteem scores: Comparison of Inuit children in Inuktitut and in French/English Kindergartens.**



## **Bilingual Education in Nunavik: Some Conclusions**

Our ongoing program of research indicates that children not only learn better in their own heritage language, but they develop a more positive view of themselves as individuals and a healthier view of Inuit children as a group. Three specific conclusions can be drawn from our findings. First, the children of Nunavik have as strong an academic potential as any other group in North America. Thus, current underachievement of minority pupils is a problem that can be addressed if there is the political will and the appropriate educational expertise to address the issue. Second, the policy of using trained Inuit teachers and teaching in the Inuktitut language for the early grades seems well founded. Students enrolled in such heritage program gain linguistic, academic and self-esteem benefits over those schooled in a second language. Thirdly, there are social benefits from being taught in one's own heritage language. By using Inuktitut as the language of instruction, the value and importance of the Inuktitut language and culture is reinforced.

These findings are consistent with an array of literature and case studies documenting the role of heritage language instruction in reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991, 2001). Fishman emphasizes linkages between collective recognition of the importance of the heritage language and use of the heritage language in the home, in the community and at school as essential in the process of reversing language shift. Furthermore, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argues that use of the heritage language, and heritage language education in particular, are important for the processes of decolonization. Finally, consistent with our research demonstrating language transfer from the heritage language to the second language, Cummins has consistently demonstrated interdependence across languages within bilingual programs (Cummins, 2001).

In the present context, the academic and social benefits of heritage language instruction may be enhanced further if the use of the heritage language were extended beyond the early years. Indeed, in many case studies described in Fishman (2001) Bilingual Education programs for minority language groups were most effective when continued throughout the entire education process. The Kativik School Board does not view its present Bilingual Education program as ideal, and is looking forward to an increase in the use of Inuktitut across the curriculum. In this way, Bilingual Education in Nunavik will continue to make substantial contributions to the protection and enhancement of Inuit language and culture.

---

Our program of research in Nunavik is ongoing. Travelling to Nunavik every year to conduct language testing has allowed us to become familiar with the communities, their residents, and many educators in the region. The language testing is seen as a positive event by community members, and we find that we are warmly welcomed into their communities and their schools. Our current research seeks to not only continue monitoring the effect of heritage language instruction on language learning and personal/collective self-esteem, but also to explore new theoretical directions and inform school board policies. We are currently seeking insight into the extent to which language transfer occurs from Inuktitut to a second language. We are also investigating the consequences of the abrupt shift in language of instruction from Inuktitut to French or English, the two dominant languages of Quebec. Our research influences policies designed to facilitate transition from Inuktitut to English or French, and to extend Inuktitut as a language of instruction into the later grades of the Kativik School Board.

---

## Biographies

**DONALD M. TAYLOR** is professor of Psychology at McGill University, Montreal. He has published both scientific articles, and books arising from projects in a variety of cultural settings including South Africa, Indonesia, Philippines, India and the United States. By far his longest term research and teaching commitment has been the fourteen communities of Arctic Quebec (Nunavik). His most recent book is entitled "The Quest for Identity" and is published by Praeger (2002).

**JULIE CAOQUETTE** is a senior doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at McGill University, Montreal. Her research interests involve understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying intergroup social inequalities. Her master's thesis explored when and how mainstream Canadians experience collective guilt with regard to the internal colonization of Aboriginal people. Her doctoral program of research focuses on group-based emotions, implicit emotions, collective guilt, egalitarianism and social responsibility in the context of Canadian society and Aboriginal people.

**ESTHER USBORNE** is a senior doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at McGill University, Montreal. Her doctoral research explores cultural identity and its relationship to the self and psychological well-being. She is currently investigating cultural identity clarity among members of the Dene First Nation in the Northwest Territories. Esther is also involved in ongoing research projects focusing on the importance of heritage language instruction for Inuit children in Nunavik and Mi'kmaq children in Cape Breton. Among her scientific papers is a recent article addressing the motivation and well-

---

being of Montreal street youth, and another summarizing research on the use of Inuktitut as a language of instruction in Arctic Quebec (Nunavik).

STEPHEN C. WRIGHT is a professor at Simon Frazer University in psychology and Canada Research Chair in Social Psychology. He is interested in the social psychological study of intergroup relations and focuses on the concept of collective identity - that the groups we belong to form an essential part of our understanding of who we are. His research explores three related themes: Reducing Prejudice, Responding to Disadvantage, and finally Minority Languages & Heritage Culture. He published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

---

## References

- About, F. E. (1988). *Children and Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
- About, F. E. (2005). The development of prejudice in childhood and adolescence. J. F. Dovidio, P. Glick, & L. A. Rudman (Eds.), *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport* (pp.310-326). Malden, MA, US: Blackwell Publishing.
- Appel, R. (1988). The language education of immigrant workers' children in the Netherlands. In T. Skutnabb & J. Cummins (Eds.), *Minority education: From shame to struggle* (pp. 57-78). Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, C., & Prys Jones, S.P. (1998). *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Brand, E.S., Ruiz, R.A., & Padilla, A.A. (1974). Ethnic identification and preference: A review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 81, 860-890.
- Carpenter, P.A., Just, M., & Snell, P. (1990). What one intelligence test measures: A theoretical account of the processing in the Raven Progressive Matrices Test. *Psychological Review*, 97, 404-431.
- Clark, K., & Clark, M. (1939). The development of consciousness of self and the emergence of racial identification in Negro preschool children. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 10, 591-599.
- Covington, M.V. (1989). Self-esteem and failure at school: Analysis and policy implications. In A.M. Mecca, N.J. Smelser & J. Vasconcellos (Eds.), *The social importance of self-esteem* (pp. 72-124). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Crawford, J. (1989). *Bilingual education: History, policies, theory and practice*. Trenton, NJ: Crane Publishing.
- Crocker, J., & Luhtanen, R. (1990). Collective self-esteem and intergroup bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 60-67.
- Cross, W.E. (1987). The two-factor theory of Black identity: Implications for the study of identity development in minority children. In J.S. Phinney & M.J. Rotheram (Eds.), *Children's ethnic socialization: Pluralism and development* (pp. 117-133). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 18-35.
- Cummins, J. (1989). *Empowering minority students*. Sacramento: California Association for Bilingualism Education.
-

- Cummins, J. (1990, June). *Language development among Aboriginal children in northern communities*. Paper presented at the Circumpolar Education Conference, Umea, Sweden.
- Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89, 585-592.
- Dorais, L. J. (1996). The Aboriginal languages of Quebec, past and present. In J. Maurais (Ed.), *Quebec's Aboriginal Languages: History, Planning, Development* (pp. 43-100). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Drapeau, L. (1996). The state of the art in linguistic research, standardization and modernization in Quebec Aboriginal languages. In J. Maurais (Ed.), *Quebec's Aboriginal Languages: History, Planning, Development* (pp. 129-158). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Duffy, R.Q. (1988). *The road to Nunavut*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Fishman, J. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon, Avon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, J. (2001). *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century perspective*. Clevedon, Avon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Frideres, J. S., & Gadacz, R. (2001). *Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Contemporary conflicts*. Sixth Edition. Toronto, Ontario: Prentice Hall.
- Hernández-Chavez, E. (1984). The inadequacy of English immersion education as an educational approach for language minority students in the United States. In Office of Bilingual/Bicultural Education (Eds.), *Studies on immersion education: A collection of United States education* (pp. 144-183). Sacramento: California State Department of Education.
- Ionescu, S., Jourdan-Ionescu, C., Alain, M., Rousseau, J., & Inostroza, J. (1992). PM47 : Analyse des résultats de 768 enfants Québécois de 6 à 11 ans [The Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices (PM47): Analysis of results from 768 6-11-yr.-old children from Quebec]. *Revue Francophone de la Déficience Intellectuelle*, 3, 25-38.
- Kativik School Board (1990). *Kativik School Board statistical information*. Unpublished report.
- Lambert, W.E. (1983). Deciding on languages of instruction: Psychological and social considerations. In T. Husen & S. Oppen (Eds.), *Multicultural and multilingual education in immigrant countries* (pp. 93-104). Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16, 23-49.
- Louis, W., & Taylor, D.M. (2001). When the survival of a language is at stake: The future of Inuittitut in Arctic Quebec. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 20 (1&2), 111-143.
- Maurais, J. (1996). The situation of Aboriginal languages in the Americas. In J. Maurais (Ed.), *Quebec's Aboriginal Languages: History, Planning, Development* (pp. 1-42). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- McLaughlin, D. (1989). The sociolinguistics of Navajo literacy. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 20, 275-290.
- Norris, M. J. (2007). Aboriginal languages in Canada: Emerging trends and perspectives on second language acquisition. *Canadian Social Trends*, 83, 19-27.
-

- Rampaul, W.E., Singh, M., & Didyk, J. (1984). The relationship between academic achievement, self-concept, creativity, and teacher expectations among Native children in a northern Manitoba school. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 30(3), 213-225.
  - Raven, J.C. (1990). *American and international norms: Raven manual research supplement 3*. London: Oxford Psychologist Press.
  - Raven, J., Raven, J.C., & Court, J.H. (1993). *Raven manual: Section 1- General overview*. London: Oxford Psychologists Press.
  - Robitaille, N., & Choinière, R. (1985). *An overview of demographic and socio-economic conditions of the Inuit in Canada*. Ottawa, Canada: Research Branch, Corporate Policy, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
  - Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education: Or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
  - Statistics Canada (2001). *Aboriginal Population Profiles, 2001*, Canadian Census 2001.
  - Taylor, D.M. (2002). *The quest for identity: From minority groups to Generation Xers*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publications.
  - Taylor, D.M., & Wright, S.C. (2002). Do Aboriginal students benefit from education in their heritage language? Results from a ten-year program of research in Nunavik. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 22(2), 141-164.
  - Williams, E., & Morland, J.K. (1976). *Race, Color and the Young Child*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
  - Willig, A.C. (1985). A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research*, 55, 269-317.
  - Wright, S.C., & Taylor, D.M. (1995). Identity and the Language of the Classroom: Investigating the Impact of Heritage versus Second Language Education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 87, 241-252.
  - Wright, S.C., Taylor, D.M., & Macarthur, J. (2000). Subtractive bilingualism and the survival of the Inuit language: Heritage- versus second-language education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(1), 63-84.
  - Wright, S.C., Taylor, D.M., & Ruggiero, K.M. (1996). Examining the potential for academic achievement among Inuit children: Comparisons on the Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(6), 733-753.
-